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Contact: Kevin Hardy

REGENTS APPROVE INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS NURSING SHORTAGE

Baton Rouge: The Louisiana Board of Regents has approved initiatives to allocate \$2.7 million to directly address the health worker shortage in the state. The funds, appropriated by the Legislature this past session, have been awarded to public institutions and graduate students and are earmarked to increase the production of sorely needed nurses and allied health professionals.

"Louisiana's colleges and universities are the workforce producers for our state. Therefore, it is critical that we continue to align our academic offerings and research with the critical needs of Louisiana. Today's efforts are an example of just such an alignment," said Savoie.

A recent report produced by the Louisiana Health Works Commission declared the state's healthcare worker shortage to be approximately 11,000 workers. This includes a need for more than 4,000 registered nurses, 3,000 licensed practical nurses, over 200 radiological technologists, nearly 300 respiratory therapists and over 200 physical therapists, as well as job openings for primary care physicians, physicians' assistants and pharmacists. The report supports efforts to increase production in each of these employment areas, citing for example a job vacancy of 4,000 nurses with only 1,400 nursing graduates to fill those spots.

The Legislature during the last session provided Health Care Workforce Development appropriations. Of the total allocation of \$2.7 million, \$1.6 million will go to Delgado Community College to establish an evening division for nurse and allied health workforce training, and \$300,000 will go to Southeastern Louisiana University for enhancement of its nursing and allied health programs.

In addition, \$600,000 will be used to develop additional nursing education faculty through a graduate education stipend program similar to the one used before by the state to address nursing shortages in the early 1990's. The stipend will provide nursing graduate students \$10,000 per semester in support of their full-time pursuit of a master's degree in

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Nursing
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nursing. Upon attainment of the degree, the individual will be employed as a faculty member in a nursing education program at a Louisiana public institution and will repay the stipend through employment service at the rate of \$10,000 per year of faculty service.

Additional workforce development funds have been allocated to the ULM Pharmacy Program to increase the production of pharmacists and to support the continued work of the Louisiana Health Works Commission.

According to the Commission, Louisiana ranks second nationally in the lack of primary care, with all or part of its 64 parishes classified as medically underserved areas.